

Saudi Duality, American Acceptance

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"Saudi Duality, American Acceptance"

Contemporary Issues Research Paper

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to

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"I want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends; it is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them."¹

Thesis: Through supporting the Saudi royal family and occupying ground deemed holy by Muslims worldwide, the United States government indirectly supports the very organizations it attempts to destroy by contributing to recruiting efforts of terrorist and extremist organizations worldwide.

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The United States' long standing relationship with the Saudi royal family provides the Saudis security necessary to maintain power and provides the United States economic stability through a stable Saudi Arabia. However, through supporting the Saudi royal family and occupying ground deemed holy by Muslims worldwide, the United States government indirectly supports the very organizations it attempts to destroy by contributing to recruiting efforts of terrorist and extremist organizations worldwide.

Foundations of US-Saudi Relations

Following World War I, ambitious American businesses targeted the Middle East in the hopes of gaining access to oil reserves. The British and French reached agreements at the San Remo conference and began exploiting reserves in Iraq. Americans were intentionally excluded from these meetings.²

The ultimate goal of the British was to monopolize power and to minimize or altogether prevent Americans from developing oil in the region. American businesses targeted concessions from King Ibn Saud, the first of the Saudi dynasty, instead. In 1933, the Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL), owned by the Rockefeller family, gained a concession to the Saudi oil fields. This development was

the beginning of American involvement in Middle Eastern oil.³

Throughout the 1930's and into the 1940's, American businesses became the de facto ambassadors to the Saudi royal family. By 1944, SOCAL, Texaco, Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (later Exxon), and Socony-Vacuum (now Mobil Oil Company) formed the Arabian American Oil Company (Aramco). With no formal ties between the Saudi and American governments, these businesses were able to invent their own truth and develop false perceptions of the Saudi kingdom within the United States government. Aramco remained under the control of these four companies until the 1970s.⁴ To protect their investments, Aramco executives often described Saudi society in a manner resembling propaganda. In conversations with the U.S. government, the leaders of these companies carefully omitted the brutal means by which the Saud family and their partners, the Wahhabis, achieved and maintained power.

The greatest single event concerning the relationship between the American and Saudi governments occurred in 1945. This event marked the first meeting between U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Saudi King Ibn Saud. During this meeting, aboard the USS Quincy, the two countries formally entered into an economic agreement and

laid the foundation for stationing American military forces within the kingdom. Although the British still maintained the security of the region, the stage was set for Americans to eventually assume those duties for the Saudis.⁵

From the early days of Aramco to the present, the Saudis have always had "friends" within the U.S. industrial complex as well as the U.S. government. In exchange for taking a favorable position towards the Saudis, financial benefits were enormous. From the beginning of official relations with Saudi Arabia, the U.S. government took a "hands off" approach to internal Saudi matters.⁶ Also, during the 1990's, the likelihood of demands for change from the U.S. Government were unlikely. The pro-Saudi lobby was too strong and the fear of disrupting the United States' economy was too great when it seemed many in the U.S. public were only concerned with their personal wealth.

Mainly due to these economic concerns, American officials as well as businesses have allowed and even assisted the Saudis in the most flagrant of human rights violations disguised as sensitivity to host country traditions.⁷ While the Saudis continue unimpeded, other nations are condemned for their human rights practices.

Within the Kingdom; religious tolerance is not practiced. Christians, Jews, Shiite Muslims, women, and

even American service members sent there to provide security have been the subjects of maltreatment. U.S. officials who voice concerns have been terminated and their attempts to gain employment elsewhere within the government stonewalled. Timothy Hunter, a former state department employee, tried to end the illegal practice of religious persecution by the Saudi secret police or "mutawa" during his tenure. His efforts eventually cost him his career in the state department.⁸

Saudi Family Support

The true origins of the situation in Saudi Arabia rest firmly within the ruling family and their Wahhabi partners. Wahhabi clerics enjoy the luxury of being the officials of the only legally practiced religion in Saudi Arabia. This partnership is dated from before Saudi Arabia was officially declared a country and reinforced through marriage. The partnership of religious reformer Ibn Abd Al-Wahhab and political leader Muhammad Ibn Sa'ud terrorized the Arabian Peninsula with its very strict interpretation of Islam starting in the 18th century.

In 1924, following years of rule by the Ottoman Turks, the Saudi-Wahhabi partners firmly established control. Their legitimacy came with British recognition following

their capture of the cities of Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites in the Muslim world. Thus, the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I signaled the end of the Ottoman Empire and brought western influence to the Arab world. British support of the Saudis assured their power over all of the Arabian Peninsula for generations to come.

Americans eventually assumed this role from the British.⁹

Wahhabi fundamentalist philosophy states the only true believers of Islam are those who practice the Wahhabi form of Islam. "Jihad" is their duty against all "non believers" to include Christians, Jews, and especially Sufi and Shiite Muslims. To the Wahhabis, Shiite Muslims are "apostates." Even Sunni Muslims who have not conformed to the rigid Wahhabi beliefs are unbelievers as far as the Wahhabi faithful are concerned. This is in direct conflict with the original tolerance and pluralism for "people of the book" taught by Muhammad and his followers. Therefore, according to many Muslim scholars, Wahhabis pervert the Muslim faith.¹⁰

Throughout their tenure within Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabi clerics have been the muscle behind the Saudis; terrorizing, jailing, and executing those that would challenge the status quo. For many years, the Wahhabis kept their brand of Islam internal to Saudi Arabia. This

changed with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the assumption of power by Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran the same year. Wahhabis, sensing an opportunity to spread their message and leery of Shiite influence spreading, began a campaign to spread Wahhabism worldwide. Through the use of "charities" such as the Muslim World League (MWL) and the International Islamic Relief Organization (IIRO), Saudi money openly funded "jihadists" worldwide.¹¹ In addition to the charities funding the international jihad movement against "nonbelievers", Saudi money also funded the building of Islamic mosques and schools or "madrassas," which taught the Wahhabi version of Islam. These schools were used as the breeding grounds for future jihadists similar to Osama bin Laden.¹² This funding went unchecked prior to September 11, 2001.

The Saudi ruling family, protected and supported by the United States government, also supported those that attacked the United States. The Saudis welcome U.S. support but continue to maintain a relationship with and financially support the Wahhabi clerics. These clerics openly call for, and in their minds, justify jihad against the United States.

Holy Ground

Saudi Arabia is the home to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites within the Muslim faith. U.S. presence within this country is undesirable to Muslims both inside and outside of the kingdom. Wahhabi clerics classify our presence as another example of American imperialism and an attempt to attack Islam and force western ideals and corruptness upon Muslims.¹³ To those having succumbed to the ideals of Wahhabism, this is the truth. Disaffected youth are often easily swayed by the Wahhabis, but the public as a whole is also targeted. They are led to believe their problems are the direct result of western nations, especially the United States. They become willing recruits in the war against the "Great Satan". Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a good way to illustrate the way these men view themselves. Based on the 4th tier of Maslow's hierarchy, esteem needs, the recruits believe they belong to something larger than themselves by joining the Wahhabis cause. In their minds, fighting Americans for the cause of Islam gives meaning to their lives and fulfills their esteem needs. The motivation of their leaders coincides with the 5th tier of Maslow's hierarchy, self-actualization. They base their actions not on how they are

perceived by others, but how they perceive themselves. They believe they are the champions of a great cause and their victory will insure the religion of the one true God will reign supreme.¹⁴

These views counter what the vast majority of Muslims believe are the true tenets of the Muslim faith as preached by the prophet Muhammad.

"Islam defines a System of Life where all humans are treated equal, where everyone lives in peace and harmony, and most importantly, all have the opportunity to "actualize" themselves so that their inner "selves" continue to climb to higher and higher levels. The life is treated as a continuum where the physical death takes humans to the next level of evolution. The actualization, as guided by the Qur'an, in this life is necessary to "make" it for the next levels of evolution. That is Heaven."¹⁵

Thus, a lack of knowledge and confusion are prevalent by many Muslims over the life one should lead in order to achieve actualization. As with any religion, The path Muslims should take to actualization has the potential to be revised by clerics who twist the Koran to fit their version of the truth.¹⁶

The true enemy of Muslims is not the United States, although some citizens in the Arab world would argue. They see the U.S. government supporting a regime who seemingly only serves itself. The same regime holds power by imposing a skewed version of Islam whose main objective is

maintenance of the status quo through propaganda and terror against its own people. Properly instituted democratic reforms are a viable solution in this country.

A democratically elected government in one of the Middle Eastern countries is a starting point. Iraq will be the first instance of this type of government in the region. Citizens naturally desire basic rights and want a voice in their government. If this type of government starts to take hold within the Middle East, the stranglehold of Wahhabi clerics and jihadists will begin to loosen.¹⁷

The current project of the United States government is to have a popularly elected government within Iraq. The establishment of democracy must be seen as the will of the Iraqi people, not the desires of Washington. Iraq cannot be perceived as a puppet of the United States; not only will democracy be unsuccessful in Iraq, but this form of government will fail to gain legitimacy among all of the Middle Eastern countries. The transformation must be done in a manner, which respects the traditions and culture of Iraq. Iraqis must elect their own government in order for it to gain legitimacy from other Middle Eastern countries and the international community. Only then will Iraq prove the merits of democracy to the other countries of its region.¹⁸

The United States government can no longer accept the status quo in its relationship with the Saudi royal family. Additionally, efforts must be undertaken worldwide to counter Wahhabi clerics' demonizing of the United States. If allowed to continue, the ranks of those willing to carry out another attack on the scale of September 11, 2001 will swell. If this happens, war will rage indefinitely, resulting in an ever increasing toll in human lives. The true solution is reform of the majority of governments within the Middle East region, where a very small minority controls all of the national wealth and the rest of the country lives in squalor. People desire a voice in how their country will be governed and a government that cares for all people of the nation. The institution of democracy within Middle Eastern countries will reduce the need for people to find a blame for their troubles and the governments they elect will no longer require a place to put that blame in order to maintain power. They will begin to see purpose to their lives and the tendency for them to become militant will be reduced.

¹ President George W. Bush, "Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People, September 20, 2001," White House, Office of the Press Secretary,
<<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html>> (10 December 2004).

² Anthony Cave Brown, Oil, God and Gold, The Story of ARAMCO and The Saudi Kings, (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 9.

³ Stephen Schwartz, The Two Faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and Its Role in Terrorism, (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 122.

⁴ "Saudi Arabia, a Brief History," Country Study and Guide,
<<http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/saudi-arabia/saudi-arabia57.html>> (29 December 2004).

⁵ Schwartz, 125.

⁶ Schwartz, 125.

⁷ Daniel Pipes, "The Scandal of U.S.-Saudi Relations," National Interest, <<http://www.meforum.org/article/pipes/995>> (28 December 2004).

⁸ Martin Edwin Andersen, "Whistle-blowers keep the faith: whistle blowers sacrifice their careers when they expose corruption, but often commitment to their religious beliefs outweighs going along to get along," Special Report, Insight on the News, Feb 11, 2002,
<http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1571/is_5_18/ai_83281475> (01 January 2005).

⁹ Schwartz, 101.

¹⁰ Schwartz, 76.

¹¹ Dore Gold, "the Saudi State and Terrorism," A briefing given April 4, 2003, <<http://www.meforum.org/article/537>> (29 December 2004)

¹² Schwartz, 199.

¹³ Schwartz, 234-235.

¹⁴ John Thompson, "Terrorism's True Motive," September 23, 2002
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¹⁵ Liaquat Ali, "Islam and Self-Actualization" 20 January 2002, revised 12 February 2002,
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¹⁶ Ali,<http://www.isbnny.org/whatsnew/Islam_and_Self_Actualization.htm> (29 December 2004).

¹⁷ Nalapat, M.D., "Outside View: Sabahism, not Wahabbism," A UPI Outside View Commentary, published 23 April 2004,
<<http://www.upi.com/view.cfm?StoryID=20040423-115330-5965r>> (27 December 2004).

¹⁸ Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Wrong Way to Sell Democracy to the Arab World
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